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INFORMATION

## BBC claims defence official smeared Kelly as an 'eccentric'

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THE MINISTRY of Defence's most senior civil servant allegedly branded Dr David Kelly an "eccentric" shortly before the Government scientist committed suicide, the BBC is preparing to tell the Hutton Inquiry. Sir Kevin Tebbit, the MoD's permanent secretary, is also said to have admitted to a BBC journalist that his department had deliberately "outed" Dr Kelly, according to evidence passed to *The Sunday Telegraph*.

The senior civil servant allegedly justified the measure to James Robbins, a BBC diplomatic correspondent, saying that the MoD regarded the scientist as unreliable and "eccentric". The accusations are contained in evidence drawn up by the BBC for the official inquiry into

Dr Kelly's death that begins tomorrow.

Mr Robbins's conversation with Sir Kevin is said to have taken place during a dinner shortly after the scientist, on secondment to the MoD from the Foreign Office, was named as the source of the BBC report that Downing Street had "sexed up" a dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

A senior BBC executive familiar with Mr Robbins's testimony said: "Tebbit basically said, 'It's a shame we had to out Kelly but he always was a bit unreliable', and made a circular gesture with his finger around his temple."

Another senior corporation manager confirmed that Mr Robbins had told his employers that Sir Kevin had described the scientist as "eccentric".

The testimony by Mr Robbins has

not been included in the BBC's initial submissions to Lord Hutton but is understood to have been held in reserve. One executive said that it was being held back by the corporation's lawyers "in case things get nasty". Another added: "It's not being explicitly submitted but if we get asked about it then we will talk about it."

The accusations will fuel suspicions that Dr Kelly was the victim of a smear campaign by the Government before and after his death. It follows last week's admission by Tom Kelly, Tony Blair's official spokesman, that he described Dr Kelly as a "Walter Mitty" character in press briefings to journalists.

An MoD spokesman refused to comment on the new allegations.

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